



Pet Waste and Water Quality



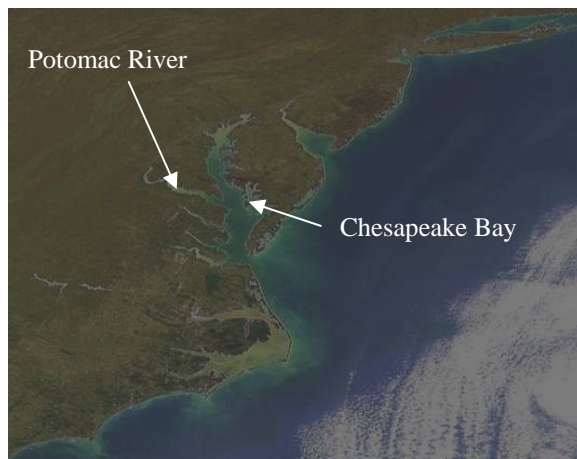
One Degree of Separation

We arrange our schedules around their walking and feeding times. We teach them tricks and count them as members of our families. They are, of course, our beloved canines. If you don't have one, there's a 100% chance that you know someone who does. Hence, the one degree of separation. In our blind pet love we tend to forget, sometimes by accident the importance of removing pet waste from our lawns, sidewalks, and roadways. But doing so is critical to

keeping our waterways clean.

Renegade Runoff

During precipitation events, pet waste is carried off our lawns and sidewalks and into our storm drains. Pet waste carried into storm drains eventually reaches our surface waters. For this reason the Environmental Protection Agency has identified pet waste as a nonpoint source pollutant. Nonpoint source pollution comes from many diffuse sources, such as pet waste and fertilizer runoff. Pet waste contains pathogens and nutrients passed through the animal's gut. During recreational activities, waterborne pathogens may be ingested and cause gastrointestinal illnesses in humans.



The breakdown of pet waste in waterways adds excess nutrients that can lead to algal blooms. This is a local and regional concern. Algal blooms inhibit sunlight from penetrating through the water column, impeding the ability of plants to photosynthesize. The loss of photosynthesis leads to oxygen depletion, followed by fish kills and other aquatic mortality. The picture at left illustrates an algal bloom. The sea green algal bloom fills the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay, while the Atlantic Ocean remains blue.

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Behavior Modification

We praise our pets when they do their business outside on the grass. Next is the owner's responsibility to remove all *business* from the lawn. The biggest obstacle to keeping pet waste out of rivers is the pet owner's reluctance to pick it up before it enters local waterways. Pet waste on roadways and sidewalks poses an immediate runoff problem. Therefore, owners should remove all pet waste from these public areas as soon as possible. Likewise, leaving pet waste on the lawn is not an effective way to fertilize it. Acceptable methods for disposal are in the toilet, buried in the yard far away

from vegetable gardens in a hole at least a foot deep, or in your outside trash. Be sure to check on your county's municipal waste laws before throwing your pet waste in the trash. By properly disposing of pet waste, dog owners can make a positive impact on the health of their local waterways.

For more information, please visit the following sites:

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/menuofbmps/>

http://mddnr.chesapeakebay.net/hab/news_041608.cfm

<http://www.mde.state.md.us/Programs/WaterPrograms/319NPS/index.asp>